

CHAP. I]

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION

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On the other hand[628]
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there were often quarrels between neighbouring groups, which might result in a state of feud between them for many months. Between communities separated from one another by a distance of only 50 miles or even less there were no direct relations whatever. The members of one community kept to their own part of the country, only leaving it to visit their friends within a narrow radius.

These local groups were united into what are here called tribes. A tribe consisted of a number of local groups all speaking what the natives themselves regard as one language, each tribe having its own language and its name. The tribe was of very little importance in regulating the social life, and was merely a loose aggregate of independent local groups.

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The local groups are further distinguished by the natives themselves as being of two kinds according as they lived on the coast or inland. This division was independent of that into tribes. Some tribes consisted of coast-dwellers only, while others included both coast-dwellers and forest-dwellers.

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Within the local group the only division was that into families. A family consists of a man and his wife and their unmarried children own or adopted.

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These were the only social divisions existing among the Andamanese, who were without any of those divisions known as "clans" which are characteristic of many primitive societies.

The natives of the Great Andaman (leaving aside the *Jarawa*, who by language and culture belong to the Little Andaman division of the race) are divided into ten tribes, each occupying a certain area of country. Each tribe consists of a number of persons who speak what is regarded by the natives themselves as one language. That the tribe is fundamentally a linguistic group is shown by the tribal names. These are all formed from a stem with the prefix *aka-*, which prefix is used in the languages of the Great Andaman to convey a reference to the mouth and thereby to the function of speech. Thus in the *Aka-Jeru* language the stem *poj* means "a hole of any kind," and *aka-poj* means "the mouth," there being no other word for that part of the body. In the same language the stem *-ar-* meaning "to talk" can only be used

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own bow, arrows, adze, etc., while the wife makes her baskets, 462
nets and so on.

The economic life of the local group, though in effect it 421
approaches to a sort of communism, is yet based on the notion
of private property. Land is the only thing that is owned in
common. The hunting grounds of a local group belong to the
whole group, and all the members have an equal right to hunt
over any part of it. There exists, however, a certain private
ownership of trees. A man of one of the local groups of the
coast may notice in the jungle a tree suitable for a canoe. He
will tell the others that he has noticed such a tree, describing
it and its whereabouts. Thenceforward that tree is regarded as
his property, and even if some years should elapse, and he has
made no use of it, yet another man would not cut it down
without first asking the owner to give him the tree. In a similar
way certain men claim to possess certain *Artocarpus* trees,
though how the ownership in these cases had arisen I was unable
to determine. No one would pick the fruit off such a tree
without the permission of the owner, and having received
permission and gathered the fruit he would give some part of
it to the owner of the tree.

A pig belongs to the man whose arrow first strikes it, though
if the arrow merely glanced off and did not remain in the wound
it would not give any claim to ownership. A turtle or a dugong
or big fish belongs to the man who throws the harpoon with
which it is taken. A honeycomb belongs to the man who
climbs the tree and cuts it down. The fish that a man shoots
belong to him, and to a woman belong the roots she digs up, the
seeds that she collects, the fish or prawns that she takes in
her net or the molluscs that she brings from the reefs. Any
weapon that a man makes belongs to him alone to do what
he pleases with, and anything that a woman makes is her own 562
property. A man is not free to dispose of the personal property
of his wife without her permission.

In the village each family erects and keeps in repair its own 421
hut, and the wife provides the hut with the firewood and water 594
needed. In the case of a communal hut it would seem that this 342
is really an example of a possession common to the whole group.

421 This is so, however, only in appearance. The hut is built by all
 594 the different families, but each family is regarded as owning
 342 a certain portion of the hut when it is finished, and it is the
 family that keeps this part of the hut in repair.

421 A canoe is cut by a number of men together. From the
 501 outset, however, it is the property of one man, who selects
 476 the tree and superintends the operation of cutting it into shape.
 He is always one of the older men, and he enlists the services of
 the younger men to help him. When finished the canoe is his
 property, and he can do with it what he pleases, giving it away,
 if he wishes, and no one has any share of ownership in a canoe
 on the ground that he helped to make it.

421 While all portable property is thus owned by individuals, the
 431 Andamanese have customs which result in an approach to com-
 574 munism. One of these is the custom of constantly exchanging
 presents with one another. When two friends meet who have
 not seen each other for some time, one of the first things they
 do is to exchange presents with one another. Even in the
 ordinary everyday life of the village there is a constant giving
 and receiving of presents. A younger man or woman may give
 some article to an older one without expecting or receiving any
 return, but between equals a person who gives a present always
 expects that he will receive something of equal value in exchange.
 At the meetings that take place between neighbouring local
 groups the exchange of presents is of great importance. Each
 of the visitors brings with him a number of articles that he
 distributes amongst the members of the group that he visits.
 When the visitors depart they are loaded with presents received
 from their hosts. It requires a good deal of tact on the part
 of everyone concerned to avoid the unpleasantness that may
 arise if a man thinks that he has not received things as valuable
 as he has given, or if he fancies that he has not received quite the
 same amount of attention as has been accorded to others.

431 It is considered a breach of good manners ever to refuse
 576 the request of another. Thus if a man be asked by another
 to give him anything that he may possess, he will immediately
 do so. If the two men are equals a return of about the same
 value will have to be made. As between an older married man

602 developed system of terms denoting social status, so in the
 601 social organisation of the Andamans there are very few special
 duties between relatives, and the conduct of persons to one
 another is chiefly determined by their respective social positions.
 This will become evident as we proceed, and it will thus be
 shown that there is a close connection between the way the
 natives denote relationships and the way in which their social
 life is affected by questions of relationship.

581 We have already seen that in the Andamanese social
 594 organisation the family is of great importance. A family is
 constituted by a permanent union between one man and one
 woman. In one of its aspects this union is a sexual one. By
 marriage a man acquires the sole right to sexual congress with
 the woman who becomes his wife. At the same time it is the
 duty of a married man to avoid sexual relations with other
 women whether married or unmarried. Promiscuous intercourse
 836 between the sexes is the rule before marriage, and no harm is
 584 thought of it. The love affairs of the boys and girls are carried
 on in secret, but the older members of the camp are generally
 fully aware of all that goes on. What generally happens is
 that after a time a youth forms an attachment with some girl
 and a marriage between them results from their love affair.

837 It is impossible, at the present time, to discover exactly how
 the Andamanese formerly regarded infidelity on the part of
 a wife or husband. In the Great Andaman there is great laxity
 in this matter at the present day. Quarrels sometimes arise
 when a husband discovers an intrigue between his wife and
 another man, but very often the husband seems to condone the
 adultery of his wife. Mr E. H. Man, writing on this subject,
 says that "conjugal fidelity till death is not the exception, but
 the rule," and adds, "It is undoubtedly true that breaches of
 morality have occasionally taken place among a few of the
 married persons who have resided for any length of time at Port
 Blair, but this is only what might be expected from constant
 association with the Indian convict attendants at the various
 homes; justice, however, demands that in judging of their moral
 characteristics we should consider only those who have been

uninfluenced by the vices or virtues of alien races¹." At the present time conjugal infidelity is very common and is lightly regarded. It is almost certain that the establishment of the Penal Settlement amongst them has affected their morals in this particular, but there does not seem to be any very satisfactory evidence that their former morality was quite so strict as Mr Man would have us believe. One piece of evidence in this matter is that the spread of syphilis, when it was first introduced amongst them seems to have been very rapid, and yet this was before many of the tribes had been very seriously affected by the Settlement.

Besides the special sexual relation between a husband and wife there is a special economic relation, if we may speak of it as such. The two share one hut between them, or one portion of a communal hut. It is the duty of the wife to provide the fire-wood and the water for cooking and drinking, and to cook the meals at the family fire. It is the duty of the husband to provide flesh food for himself and for his wife, while it is her duty to provide and prepare vegetable food.

A marriage is not regarded as fully consummated until the birth of a child. Mr Man states that the survivor of a childless couple is not looked upon as the chief mourner. A father who has been away from home greets his wife first on his return and then greets his other relatives; but if no child has been born to him a husband first greets his blood-relatives (father, mother, brothers, etc.) and only after that does he visit his wife.

The only regulation of marriage is on the basis of relationship. Marriage is forbidden between near *consanguinei*. The exact rules, in this matter, if indeed there be any exact rules, are difficult to discover. It is quite clear that a man would not be permitted to marry his sister or half-sister, nor his father's or mother's sister, nor his brother's or sister's daughter. The question is more difficult when it comes to the matter of cousins. In 1908 I only found one pair of first cousins who were married to one another, this being in the *Aka-Ba* tribe. The husband

¹ Man, *op. cit.* p. 135. He speaks of the wives as "models of constancy."

tracted hardship and considerable risk, not so much from the natives themselves as from the implacable Andaman sea. We had a terrible time during several of our landings from the open Indian Ocean. Constant danger additionally stimulated the development of research in Little Andaman. All the Indians and the Burmese behaved bravely. Among them I wish to mention here my Indian stenographer, a married man nearing thirty, from Bengal: RAMMAH KUMAR DEY, who, on 12 and 13 February, 1953, on the south coast of the island shared two frightfully narrow escapes with me. I am sure that neither of us will ever forget it. I later found a comfortable landing place, now indicated by floating buoys, on the north coast. Two other Bengalese assistants who were a great help to me in Little Andaman and had been selected from a number of young aspirants, are PRONAB GANGULI and BIMAL CHANDRA ROY. My work in the Andamans could not have been accomplished without them and without the initiative and encouragement of officers such as Dr. B. S. GUHA, Director of the Department of Anthropology of the Indian Government, Mr. AJAY K. GHOSH, the kind, open-minded Chief Commissioner of Andamans and Nicobars during my 1951-1953 stay there, and Mr. S. N. MAITRA, who succeeded Mr. Ghosh as Chief Commissioner. In a book that I am writing I try to point out the significance of my work in the Andamans, carried out with the help of such distinguished, and sometimes heroic, Indian collaborators.

I. Hygienic Conditions

1. Habitation

The nomadic Onge have two kinds of shelter: one temporary, the other permanent, used only for short periods at a time. The Little Andaman forest is full of abandoned temporary shelters; the permanent camps are fewer, mainly situated along the coast. They consist of communal huts, strongly built by a number of families roaming under the direction of a leader. The huts have a ritual significance, as we shall presently see. Inside each communal hut are a number of beds generally equal to the number of families. Small fires are kept burning day and night near the beds, a precaution that I was thankful for on many cold nights succeeded by hot days. The Onge require nothing more against the cold. In their camps they can withstand the heaviest storms and drenching rains. In order to avoid chills it is enough for them to protect their fires from extinction. This applied to me too, while living among the Onge. The warmth and the dry air ensured good health for us all.

A few additional beds are for the use of bachelors nearing marriage. Most of the beds are marginally and radially placed; a few are placed transversally. Normal beds accommodate father, mother (the Onge are monogamous), children and dogs, all in a heap. In temporary as in permanent shelters it is customary for families to eat separately, each close to its bed. The low, round roof of the communal hut does not reach the ground; a gap of 30 cms is left free for creeping in and out at will without using the main door (a simple mat to be lifted). Rubbish is thrown carelessly everywhere, e.g. directly outside the circular hut, which is consequently surrounded by a malodorous ring of bones, imperfectly cleaned shells, bits of rotting shellfish and other animals - a rich breeding ground for flies and various other insects that rapidly destroy everything edible, leaving the grass to grow until the next lot of garbage accumulates. Building and rebuilding a communal hut always on the same